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SUBJECT: FORMER PSC PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE VITERI PLOTS HER
RETURN

REF: A. REF: A) 2007 GUAYAQUIL 460

[1](#)B. B) GUAYAQUIL 25

[1](#)C. C) 2006 GUAYAQUIL 1050

Classified By: Consul General Douglas Griffiths for reasons 1.4 (b) and
(d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Former Social Christian Party (PSC) presidential candidate Cynthia Viteri will reenter the political arena this year through a new center-right movement. Viteri is soliciting funds, talking to potential allies and recruiting candidates in provinces on the coast and in the southern highlands. With few other viable candidates, Viteri immediately makes the short list of politicians who have enough name recognition to compete in a national campaign. However, her PSC past and poor track record in the last elections make it unlikely that she could beat the popular president if elections are held following the Constituent Assembly. The politically astute Viteri will therefore probably focus on securing a seat in congress and positioning herself for a presidential campaign when her chances are better. END SUMMARY.

FORMER PSC PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE VITERI BACK IN POLITICS

[1](#)2. (C) After quitting the Social Christian Party (PSC) in early 2007 (Ref A), former presidential candidate Cynthia Viteri has emerged from her self-imposed exile with a new political movement and an eye on the elections that are likely to follow the Constituent Assembly. Capitalizing on the slogan of Guayaquil Mayor Jaime Nebot's successful January 24 rally, "Guayaquil on the March" (Ref B), she has named her new movement "Ecuador on the March" and is recruiting potential candidates in the areas where she herself was strongest as a candidate: the coast and the southern highlands. "We have identified ten or eleven provinces (out of 24 total) in which we will groom candidates," she explained. Viteri had been waiting to see how the political landscape developed before returning to the arena (Ref A). "I was tired of waiting and decided that the time was right to get back in the game," she told Poloff.

[1](#)3. (SBU) A protege of former President and Guayaquil Mayor Leon Febres-Cordero, Viteri is a charismatic and media-friendly former beauty queen, attorney and journalist. After Viteri served in a variety of public relations jobs within the PSC, Febres-Cordero tapped her as the party's 2006 presidential candidate. She polled strongly early in the campaign and appeared to be a good bet to finish in the top two and land in the runoff round. However, when Febres-Cordero pulled his financial support in order to back banana magnate Alvaro Noboa's campaign, Viteri plummeted in

the polls, finishing a disappointing fifth (Ref C). Despite her bitterness over the election results, she agreed to become the party's second vice president in early 2007, vowing to reform what had become a discredited organization. Frustration over the PSC's reluctance to pursue grassroots change led her to quit the party shortly thereafter.

NEW PARTY SEEKING ALLIANCES, FUNDS & SEATS IN NEW CONGRESS

¶4. (C) According to Viteri, her new movement is shopping for candidates and funds for the congressional elections likely to take place later this year. While eager to make Ecuador on the March a force in the new congress, she admitted that she was having some difficulty identifying good potential candidates. "I have been looking at a number of former congressmen, such as Jorge Cevallos (the former Congressional President from PRIAN), Manuel Gonzalez (Democratic Left (ID)) and Ramses Torres (Pachakutik)," she told Poloff. "The problem is that congress has such a bad reputation. On the other hand, new faces can be very hard to get elected." Viteri also mentioned that her sister Natalie, a congresswoman who lost her seat in a controversial move by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal in early 2007, would run as a candidate in Guayas province. In addition, Ecuador on the March is exploring alliances with other like-minded, center-right opposition parties like Humberto Mata's Ecuador Force and Eduardo Maruri's A New Option (UNO). However, Viteri ruled out any partnership with PRIAN. "Noboa is just too difficult to work with," she told Poloff.

VITERI UNDECIDED WHETHER TO RUN FOR PRESIDENT OR CONGRESS

¶5. (C) Viteri herself is keen to secure an office in 2008

and plans to run either for president or for a national congressional seat. "It really depends on which elections are held this year," she explained. Her preference at this point would be congress, as she feels that Correa is still too popular to challenge. However, she told the Consul General that Correa's success and the current U.S. electoral campaign demonstrate that "charisma and money can forge an unbeatable alliance in a short period of time." She emphatically denied any interest in running against incumbent Jaime Nebot for mayor of Guayaquil. Although the two were members of rival factions within the PSC, they maintain a cordial relationship, and Viteri respects Nebot's strength in Guayaquil enough to stay out of that race.

SOME CHARISMA BUT LOTS OF BAGGAGE

¶6. (C) COMMENT: Many political observers here expect a quick round of congressional and presidential elections later this year if the new constitution being drafted by the Constituent Assembly is approved. With Nebot reluctant to step forward as a national leader, Noboa discredited and harassed by the Correa government and the Gutierrez brothers under similar scrutiny, the door is open for Viteri, Mata, Maruri or another outsider to assume the mantle of "opposition leader".

Viteri is media-friendly, but the 2007 elections demonstrated that she has limited appeal outside of the coast. She also may be fatally tainted by her past association with the PSC and thus an easy target for Correa on the campaign trail. She rightly recognizes that to launch a national campaign she would need a backer with deep pockets. With this in mind, she will probably choose to focus on capturing a seat and a small bloc in the new congress to position herself for a subsequent presidential run.

GRIFFITHS